

Hi. Thanks for answering my call for people to interview about Flash games. I have a bunch of questions outlined below and the more in-depth your answers, the better, but please don't feel pressured to answer every one of them.

Please note in this list of questions: when I ask you about "Flash games" specifically, I mean the ones released in-browser between 1999 and 2021. If you're still making games with Flash, great! I'd like to hear about it. But since this book is mainly focused on Flash games in the browser, I'd like answers based around that context.

Personal History

● **Tell me about yourself.**

I'm Reece Millidge - an 80s gamer on the BBC Micro and seafront arcades, brief indie developer of platform game Odyssey for the Amiga 500 in 1995, turned London commercials animator and compositor, turned full time indie games developer under the studio name Damp Gnat in Brighton UK. Being a BAFTA Breakthrough Brit in 2014 was a direct result of my Flash games and I'm still making them today.

● **What Flash games did you make?**

Icyle - 2009 (Flash browser) - frozen apocalypse platform game featuring a naked man on a bike.

Adverputt - 2010 (Flash browser) - mini golf advergame with sponsored holes.

Wonderputt - 2011 (Flash browser & later mobile) - polymorphing adventure golf with cows, toads, ski slopes and torpedos.

Icyle: On Thin Ice - 2013 (AIR mobile & desktop) - sequel

Wonderputt Forever - 2021 (AIR mobile & later desktop) - sequel

● **How else were you involved in the Flash community?**

Attending and giving talks at various games expos and festivals opened up a direct connection to players and aspiring students.

● **What was your first Flash game that you played, and on what site?** The first Flash game that I remember playing was Mini Golf by Electrotank on Miniclip. I'm not sure Wonderputt would have existed if I hadn't, as this was being played around the office and must have planted a seed in my brain.

● **What do you remember about the community? How they interacted, voted, shared games with each other?**

I remember a period when flash games were commonly shared via email or messengers, importantly by non-gamers as well as gamers. There was no other medium like it where people could instantly share a new interactive experience that they'd found. I think the sheer novelty of a rapidly developing and accessible internet really helped these things go viral. Player comments and ratings remain as polarised and unrestrained as they always have. Portals such

as Kongregate had good systems for filtering quality reviews to weed out unconstructive rants.

● **What are your favorite Flash games? Both massive and obscure.**

I remember sitting at a PC absorbed in simply gliding the mouse cursor over those curling title letters of the first Samorost game when it arrived online. As an animator with gaming roots, I was mesmerised at how this demonstrated what an animator could do with these new web tools. Amanita went on to do wonderful things with the Samorost series, Machinarium and more.

Vector Park was also shared around the animation circuit, offering a more unorthodox web experience. Feed the Head and Windosill were sublime puzzle games and unbelievably ahead of their time technically and in their design. I still hold these in the highest regard. They haven't aged at all!

● **What was your favorite portal and why? Any runner-ups?**

Newgrounds' artistic bias and emphasis on animation offered the online community I felt the most in tune with.

● **What would you consider your strongest memory of Flash gaming? It doesn't have to be necessarily the best.**

Being part of the IGF showcase at GDC in 2012 was an absolute thrill. Meeting with developers, journalists, publishers, investors and the public who were hungry to talk, critique and play the games. It was also the first time I saw players' reactions to my own games, to really soak up what resonated, what worked and what didn't. It was an intense and memorable experience.

● **Do you remember any portals, users or general stories that a casual community member might not know of? I'd love to get some more obscure stories into the book.**

● **Overall, what is your favorite part of Flash games, major or minor?** The majority of Flash games were noncommercial, free and accessible - this exposed me to many new genres of gaming. It was an education and a delight to see genres evolving as it happened.

Developing for Flash

● **What made you consider developing a Flash game?**

Tokyo Plastic launched an amazing website which used Flash to feature stunning animation, sound and music. This inspired me to make my own website to showcase my animation portfolio. I integrated a little game where you had to land airdropping pints of beer into an old man's boat lost at sea. The penny dropped that the tools to make and self publish games were already at my fingertips.

● **How difficult was it for you to get started?**

Having dabbled in visual basics as a kid, Flash's simple actionscript commands for navigating timelines felt intuitive, so I was off to a good start.

● **What was the first Flash game you released, and on what site?
What do you remember about its release?**

Icyle was my first dedicated Flash game and without any knowledge of games portals, business models, site locking, embedding and server bandwidths I just put it onto my (what was then) hobby website - dampgnat.com. Within days it went viral and crashed the site. By the time I got it back up, I noticed the file had been distributed onto other sites. In response to a flurry of online reviews (around the same week Adam Saltsman's Canabalt came out) I rushed to improve difficulty curves and add restart points, but by then most sites were embedding the scattered release version, and so my updates didn't have global effect. In the following weeks other developers reached out and kindly unveiled a games industry I didn't know existed. The prospect of making web games for a living was suddenly a possibility! However, the sponsorship value of Icyle had plummeted because it was already released and the SWF had leaked. As exciting and rewarding as the launch was, the panic and realisation of a missed opportunity was a bitter pill to swallow. I had a lot to learn.

● **What drew you to making Flash games specifically? Did other platforms like Shockwave, Unity, Java or so on carry any appeal?**

Flash (and in its new form Animate) was always first and foremost an animation tool so as a professional animator I felt at home using its nested timelines. I was also using Dark Basic at the time to develop 3D prototypes for a hobby, all the while developing my severely limited coding skills. I'd already invested in Flash before Unity came along, which lacked the animation and vector tools that I felt at home with.

● **Did you work alone? If not, who did you work with, and how did you meet them?**

My college films audio collaborator Andrew Jacobs and my brother Dan Millidge were both developing their music and sound design portfolios and were kind enough to gamble their time into my non commercial projects and put up with my sense of humour and particular design requirements. The games just wouldn't be the same without their amazing efforts. I've always championed quality bespoke sound design in games, it makes *all* the difference.

● **Can you give me just a quick, point-by-point overview of how you developed games? The technical side of things purely - how you program for Flash, how you create resources like graphics & sound (if applicable), how functionality improved & things changed in later versions of Flash, anything you can think of that might be noteworthy or interesting to the nerdy-minded.**

Apart from sound, Icyle was made entirely within one product - Macromedia Flash 8 between 2005 and 2009. I assembled the character and scenery on the

stage drawing in vectors within nested timelines using a mix of motion and shape tweening. Actionscript 2 was written onto the main timeline but also within movieclip timelines and on symbols, so the code was pretty scattered around. Initially php was used to send data between Flash Player and a MySQL database for leaderboards. The whole thing was a bit of a crash course in web technologies.

When it came to Adverputt and Wonderputt I had to upgrade to Adobe's Flash and adapt my processes and expand into other software. I went through a process of migrating from AS2 in the IDE to AS3 in Flashdevelop, which was a steep learning curve for me but worth it for the performance boost and practicality. I was by now using a mix of 2D assets in Photoshop and building 3D models rendered to bitmaps in 3D Studio Max. These would all integrate alongside the vector animation to create a visual aesthetic beyond the scope of what Flash offered natively. I was in a fortunate position to be able to apply these skills and the knowledge learnt from working in commercial animation studios.

● **Were there any interesting technical challenges you had to face while making a game in Flash?**

Icicle was born out of the very limitations of Flash. This is significant. In 2005, most PCs couldn't run Flash fast enough for moving vector scenery, so I decided to make a game with static imagery and a lone character. An ice age was the ideal setting for frozen scenery and a naked man offered instant empathy in such a cold environment. Giving him a squeaky kids BMX just added to his humiliation and helped endear players to him.

● **What was the development community like? Any forums or boards or other sites that are worthy of mention?**

I was a self taught coder, but really the bulk of it was learnt from online forums and tutorials. It's sad to see sites such as Republic of Code just disappear from the web. These were almost lifelines to an indie developer! The FGL chat rooms were also a godsend and really helped me get to grips with how licensing and other business models worked. I'm still in contact and work with some of the devs from there now. Their support and banter have helped tremendously over the years.

For a period there were monthly pub gatherings such as Brighton, Cambridge and London Indies. I didn't attend many but it was a comfort to know those creative hubs were bubbling away.

● **Did you make games as a hobby, on the side, or a full time job? Did it ever get 'serious', and if so, when?**

I'd saved up a small float to just try stuff out for a year while taking a break from working in commercials. It was free reign but finite, so whatever I dabbled in had to hold some prospects for moving my career forward. Short film pitches got as far as shortlists but Icicle was what opened things up.

My 3rd game Wonderputt secured a significant sponsorship deal with Kongregate in 2011 and numerous non-exclusive licenses via FGL. This was the moment I

became a full time indie developer, but in retrospect this ironically also seems to be the moment when the Flash games market began its decline.

● **What was your first “viral game”, what were the circumstances around it, and what was it like inside your head and on your site/portal entry when it did go viral?**

(discussed previously)

● **Did you ever have a strategy when making games, marketing or business wise? Or did you just work on what was fun?**

After working in animated commercials for years these games were an opportunity to bring my own visions to life without commercial compromise. Having said that, Adverputt was commercial to its core, it being an advergame, but was still an independent experiment to find an alternative business model, which sadly failed. Fortunately I was able to reuse the engine, and it was a crucial stepping stone for the next game.

● **What was it like working with Flash portals like Kongregate? What sort of deals would you make, if any? Did you ever use something like Flash Game License, and if so, can you tell me about your experience with it?**

FGL was great for indie devs, to have a single place that brought publishers' and portals' eyes to new games and host an effective sponsorship auction system. Exclusivity deals offered the most up front but primary sponsorships seemed to be more popular because they allowed for non-exclusive licenses to be sold to other portals. However, it was really hard for indies without much experience, such as myself, to gauge the value of a specific game on a specific portal, as it varied wildly. Implementing various portal SDKs was time consuming for me, as I had to interpret other people's code and logic which was like learning another language.

● **How much did the community support you, and how did they contribute to your success?**

My games weren't really the sort of games that would build a following, as they were generally short novel experiences that didn't retain players. Communities behaved very differently per portal. Icycle resonated well on Newgrounds but sank on Kongregate because a lot of teenagers were sensitive to the naked man thing. So very early on I was aware of how different demographics responded. I received a lot of encouraging emails from people who articulated their experiences playing the games. One grandparent relished playing Wonderputt with their granddaughter, which showed how well the game's appeal was spanning generations. It's in those moments you know you've struck a worthy chord and feel a strong sense of purpose in continuing to develop a voice and vision to share with others.

● **Were you around pre-and-post Macromedia era Flash? Are you able to draw a comparison between the two companies' handling of the technology?** A lot of indies are understandably unhappy with the Creative Cloud sub when Animate is often the only application they need. But for me it's

been ideal, as I also use Photoshop, Illustrator, After Effects, Premiere and Audition.

The Adobe Integrated Runtime (AIR) was crucial to allow Flash to live on beyond the browser, so Adobe was moving things in the right direction, but the support lost momentum at some point. Harman has since done a great job in taking over the reigns.

- **Do you think Adobe buying Flash at the end of the day caused more damage than it would have if Macromedia hadn't been bought out?**

I don't think Adobe truly realised or appreciated just how good Flash/Animate was for making games. Its lack of development in that direction has always made me wonder what would have happened if Macromedia had kept hold of it.

The End of Days

- **At what point did Flash go into "freefall" in the public consciousness, in your point of view?**

- **Have you ever met anyone blatantly anti-Flash or anti-Flash games specifically? Did you try to change their mind? Were you successful?**

"Flash is dead" was such a poorly phrased and misleading meme. I'd tried time after time to reinforce that it was "Flash *Player*" that was under threat, not the tool or its cross platform runtime AIR. Small wonder they changed the app's name.

- **What didn't you like about Flash as a platform, either during its peak or fall? Anything specifically egregious worth mentioning?**

- **Around what point did Flash stop becoming profitable and/or getting enough back to cover development time? Did this make you want to stop making Flash games?**

In 2014 it became clear that the SWF file was losing its value because of a steady but sure decline in sponsorships and licensing on FGL. So it was fortunate that by this time I had brought my games to mobile. But this didn't stop me from making games in Flash because it perfectly matched my skill set, and AIR was working out practical and profitable enough for me to keep going with it on mobile.

- **How many people were still playing your games at the end? Did you ever find out overall total player numbers? Any thoughts on those numbers?** The last time I checked stats while Icycle was still running on Mochimedia's servers was showing around 75 million sessions but that excludes the leaked launch version which had no analytics in place. So it's

likely to be over 100m, which still blows my mind. What a great time to have been making games and getting such exposure.

● **Any opinions on the state of the indie gamedev industry, and what it was like compared to Flash at its rise & peak?**

The games industry has changed so much and is still shifting around so fast. It's super competitive and much harder to survive as a solo developer required to target multiple platforms and device variations. I can now only operate by upscaling crew on a per project basis and it's too risky to invest your own time and money without backing. Premium games on mobile had its heyday for indies but now subscription models are offering an interesting alternative. If only the state of tech had frozen around 2010, I would still be happy making Flash browser games for a single universal target platform - Flash Player.

● **How do you feel about Flash having gone away from browsers? Do you miss it? What do you miss the most about it?**

Being a purely digital form, there's definitely a frustrating sense of loss. If it weren't for the efforts of archivers and new interpreter engines bringing them back, it would have felt like a huge waste.

● **If you could do it all again, would you?**

My only regret is not starting earlier, learning faster, failing faster, putting out more games and establishing a better financial float as a platform for self financing future development. Some Flash devs managed this, but not many.

● **What have you been up to since Flash left the public consciousness?**

● **What do you think of efforts like AwayFL and Ruffle? Do you think they might recapture the magic of Flash in the browser if ever completed?**

AwayFL is something I've personally invested in during its development. Away Studios were able to port Icycle and its sequel to Android, PC and Mac, which I couldn't do via AIR because it was written in AS2. The tech is coming on leaps and bounds and has already brought a lot of classic Flash games back to the browser via Poki. Icycle and Wonderputt will be making the same leap very soon. Nice for those who are nostalgic but also good to bring these titles back to a browser audience for which they were originally intended.

● **Speaking of recapturing the magic, how do you feel about HTML5 games today?**

I consume games very differently these days. Most of my gaming is on console and with the family, so I'm not generally in the habit of browsing HTML5 games and don't get sent links to play any.

● **How can we play your games now that Flash has been exorcised from most browsers?**

Currently - FlashPoint is ideal to play the originals. Icycle is included in its sequel on Steam for PC & Mac. Wonderputt is on iOS and Android if subscribed

to GameClub.

● **Are you still using Flash for anything in particular today?**
(To come when able to disclose)

● **Anything else you want to say?**

Related links:

Wonderputt WIP diary - <http://www.dampgnat.com/wonderputtwip/>

Origins of Icycle video doc - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DZl5iaMpoBg>